

Summary of the Save Bastion Point Campaign

(August 2013)

Bastion Point is an iconic headland on Victoria's Wilderness Coast, with significant natural, recreational and cultural values. It is situated in Mallacoota, a small town in East Gippsland, surrounded by Croajingolong National Park, a World Biosphere Reserve. Bastion Point is appreciated by locals and visitors alike for its breathtaking beauty, its surf, its beach, its rocks and its diverse wild life.

Bastion Point also provides ocean access for recreational and commercial boaters. The current boat ramp is in a state of disrepair. However, the proposal put forward by East Gippsland Shire Council to "improve" the area for boating is a gross overdevelopment that is totally inappropriate for the area. It includes a 130m long 2.8m high breakwater constructed on the reef and into a surf break, a 150 metre road/causeway on the beach, and a large car park extending along the cliff top. The creation of the boating channel requires the destruction and removal of more than 3500 cubic metres of a rare reef habitat, and ongoing dredging to remove sand that will accumulate.

The Save Bastion Point Campaign (SBPC) formed in 2005 to better coordinate action for the protection of the many values of Bastion Point, and the prevention of inappropriate development on our coast. The proposed development required an Environment Effects Statement (EES). This was prepared by the proponents, the East Gippsland Shire Council. A public Inquiry was subsequently held. After a thorough examination of all the submissions and expert evidence, the Inquiry Panel concluded that the proposed development was of no societal benefit, and should not proceed. Instead, it recommended a minor upgrade, without break walls, at the current site.

The then Minister for Planning chose to ignore this advice and recommendation, and gave his nod to the proposal known as Option 3b. Subsequently, the East Gippsland Shire Council continued to prepare its Application for final consent required from the Minister for Environment under the Coastal Management Act.

Angered and dismayed at this blatant overriding of due process, the Campaign continued in its efforts. This has included a judicial review in the Supreme Court, VCAT hearings, continued analyses of the economics of the development, boating data collection, political lobbying and the promotion of an alternative concept plan developed by the Campaign.

During the last state elections, Independent Craig Ingram, an outspoken advocate for the development, lost his seat to Nationals candidate, Tim Bull. The Coalition had promised to review the project if elected. An inter- department project team was duly set up to manage the review process.

The project team engaged Hyder consultants to carry out the review. Hyder developed a concept at the current boat ramp site, which they labelled 'Alternate H2'. Hyder performed a 'Multi Criteria Analysis' that found Alternate H2 had the highest rating. In a public submission period, 28% of submissions supported the version of H2 that had undergone the analysis, and around 50 % of submissions favoured no breakwall or a substantially smaller one. Only 11% supported the Council's preferred Option 3b. Despite this result, the East Gippsland Shire Council remained determined to pursue its Option 3b. However, in a surprising last-minute turnaround, on April 2012 Councillors voted to ask Government to further pursue the Government's preferred option and to seek broad community support for it.

Documents obtained by Freedom of Information indicate that the Department of Transport fully supported the H2 concept - they said it was cheaper, had significantly fewer adverse environmental and cultural heritage issues, and in terms of safety would perform as well or better than Option 3b.

Despite this, in September 2012 East Gippsland Shire Council voted to proceed with 3b, and began finalising its Application for Coastal Management Act consent.

Lobbyists appear to have been at work within Government, and the Department of Sustainability and Environment who had previously advised that Option 3b would not get Coastal Management Act (CMA) approval, changed its tune. In January 2013, Minister Ryan Smith gave CMA approval to Option 3b, and East Gippsland Shire Council in July signed a contract with GPM Constructions to commence building Option 3b in September 2013.

Save Bastion Point continue in their efforts to stop this devastating development. If it proceeds, it will be a sad day for Mallacoota, for Victoria's coast, and for grassroots democracy.